2. Board of Officers have been ordered by the Army Authorities to conduct joint surveys in association with the representatives of Directorate General of Defence Estates and Local Revenue Authorities to assess the damages occured to the crops. The details of damages occurred to the crops of the farmers would be known after the joint surveys are completed.

3. However, in order to give immediate relief to the farmers for the damages occurred to their crops, a sum of Rs. 36 crores, which is 25% of the amount projected by the State Revenue Authorities as loss towards the crops, has been sanctioned to the State Government of Punjab as "on account" payment to be made to the farmers. Out of this, about a sum of Rs. 21 crores has already been disbursed to the affected people/ farmers. Another sum of Rs. 30 crores has also been sanctioned to the State Government of Punjab as compensation to the damages occurred to the crops, on the recommendations of Army HQrs.

4. A sum of Rs. 13.80 crores, which is 25% of the amount projected by the State Revenue Authorities as loss towards the crops, has been sanctioned to the State Government of Rajasthan as "on account" payment to be made to the individual to the affected people/farmers. Similarly, a sum of Rs. 3.75 crores, which is 25% of the amount projected by HQ Northern Command as loss towards the crops, has been sanctioned to the State Government of J&K as "on account" payment to be made to the individual farmers.

5. The payment made to the people/farmers will be adjursted against the final projections to be submitted by the Board of Officers constituted for the purpose by the Local Military Authorities.

Vacancies in the Army

1517. SHRI RAMACHANDRA KHUNTIA: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) the total number of vacancies in officer cadre in the Army alongwith time since when the vacancies are laying unfilled;

(b) the reasons for the vacancies lying unfilled; and

(c) the fresh steps taken/proposed to be taken by Govenment to fill up all the vacancies in officer cadre in Army?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) to (c) At present there is a shortage of 12,554 officers' in the Army. Deficiencies of varying levels have been existing over a period of time.

2. Some of the factors which could be attributed to the shortfall in the strength of officers in the Army are the following:—

(i) Although a good number of candidates pass through the written part of the examination, many get rejected through Service Selection Board (SSB) which is mandatory for selection of officers, as they are not of the requisite caliber.

(ii) Relatively risky and hazardous career in the Army compared to other options available, as the society develops and gets modernized, has also a significant impact on the preference of potential Army aspirants.

3. Several steps have been initiated by the Government. An Image Projection Campaign of the Army was launched during 1997-98. The Campaign has made a positive impact on the availability and selection of candidates. Steps have been taken to continue the Campaign.

4. Through in-house re-appropriation of resources, the training capacity has been increased resulting in increased intake of about 400 officers per annum.

Flying clearance to grounded MiG-21's

1518. SHRI K. RAMA MOHANA RAO: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the Ministry of Defence has cleared the grounded Squardrons of MiG-21 for operational flying; and

(b) if so, the reasons therefor?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): (a) There was no grounding of MiG-21 squadrons.

(b) Does not arise.